

The Builder.

No. CCCLXXXI.

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 1850.



THE committee appointed to examine the plans for the building required for the great Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations, submitted in reply to the commissioners' advertisement, have had a difficult task, and have worked zealously to get through it,—which, by the way, is more than can be said for some of the committees connected with the undertaking, who appear to be fast asleep and not even dreaming. Of these, however anon. The building committee—which we may remind our readers comprises three leading architects, Mr. Barry, Mr. Cockerell, and Mr. Donaldson; and three leading engineers, Mr. Brunel, Mr. W. Cubitt, and Mr. Stephenson—have met perhaps twenty times, and are now about to publish their report. We shall not be suspected of desire to say any thing personally offensive in the least degree to any of these gentlemen: to be forced to do so would pain us much: nor will it be thought that we have a wish to assist those who are trying to raise a feeling opposed to the success of the great undertaking. We have already so fully expressed our strong conviction of the good results which may be expected to follow from the Exhibition, that this is not likely. Our very anxiety, however, to see the scheme efficiently carried out, will lead us to point out such steps in the proceedings as seem objectionable and calculated to injure the cause; and we must not be deterred by any personal feelings from commenting on them, with the view of obtaining a reconsideration of them, or of preventing other mistakes. The expenditure, if the statements forwarded to us be correct, has been enormous, especially as compared with the results up to this time. The finances should be dealt with by the committee most carefully. To secure efficiency and do justice to the cause, there should be no stint; but all useless expenditure must be scrupulously eschewed. But what we have to say at the present time relates to the proceedings of the Building Committee, which seem calculated to cause dissatisfaction.

The committee have selected, from the 240 plans submitted to them, some sixty, as supplying useful hints, and have named their authors: of these they have distinguished a smaller number as more particularly entitled to commendation. The one plan from which the most advantage has been derived is, it appears, the work of a young architect residing in Islington,—up to this time, as we are told, unknown.

Founded on these, the Committee have themselves prepared a plan, which will be published, together with some (possible) elevations, and then tenders will be asked for, to be accompanied by such suggestions for improvement on the published scheme as contractors may think fit to make. Something is said of allowing scope for those who put up different portions of the building, to show their own taste and skill in the way of decoration.

We may take upon ourselves to hint that, according to the committee's plan, the whole extent of the building, 2,000 and odd feet in length!

will be open; that it will be formed into three main divisions (with side branches) by iron (water-pipe) columns, the middle aisle being the highest, and that its great and startling feature—a novelty in construction—will be a central dome of enormous diameter. The side walls will be comparatively low: the clumps of trees included within the area will be made available for refreshment places,—first, second, and third class.

For the examination of the designs and preparation of this plan, the first step taken by the committee was obtaining the services of Mr. Digby Wyatt, the secretary of the executive committee, an excellent draughtsman and ornamentist, but who does not profess, so far as we know, any practical experience as an architect. For this reason, therefore, we suppose, a young engineer, Mr. Wild, was associated with him at 500*l.* per annum, and if the committee had stopped here we should, perhaps, have had little to say upon the subject; but to these two gentlemen they have now added Mr. Owen Jones, at another 500*l.* per annum, making, with Mr. Wyatt's 700*l.*, the sum of 1,700*l.* per annum. Of the amount, however, we would say but little, if it were to be wisely spent. Mr. Jones is an able man in his department, and deserved, what he has received, the applause of the public for his very fine work on the *Alhambra*; but why he, of all men in the profession, should be appointed to see this building carried out, unless it be to show, on Government authority, that architects need know nothing of construction, and that building is not their province, we are unable to divine. We shall be truly glad if we find ourselves able to take a different view of this matter when the report of the committee is published.

The plans are to be exhibited in the beginning of next month at the Institution of Civil Engineers.

Nothing has yet been said about rewarding the authors of the selected designs, but we trust the justice of this will not be overlooked.

We are glad to find that the working classes in various parts of the country are moving in aid of the exhibition. At Blackburn, the workpeople in various mills have handed in upwards of 2*l.* At Bolton, as already mentioned by us, a separate subscription fund is established, called "The Operative Fund," for assisting artisans in perfecting objects for exhibition. At Bradford (Yorkshire), money-clubs have been established, for the purpose of providing funds to visit the Exhibition. So also at Bridport, Bromsgrove, Northampton, &c. At Edinburgh, the trades are reported to have declared their intention to raise 10,000 sixpences from working men towards the general fund.* At Southampton, nearly 40*l.* were subscribed by workmen in two days towards the general fund. The Mayor states that, independent of the general fund, an Exhibition Travelling Fund is established, by which, in contributions of one penny a-week, means will be raised to enable the workmen to visit London during the Exhibition. So also at Worthing. Mr. Thos. Cubitt's men at Thames Bank have subscribed a considerable sum, and a lecture was delivered before them on Thursday evening last, ex-

* The provisional committee, there are in their address,— "Since civilization had existence, this will be the most extraordinary exhibition of 'Labour's Product' ever exhibited at one time and place, and, if duly appreciated by the people, it may be in their hands an extraordinary means of self and social improvement. Its tendency to elevate the mind, and develop the latent powers of ingenuity, must induce men to stamp a value on the results of labour, and to enforce a more just remuneration to the labourer. Industry, and the true interests of industry, have been too long depressed and held in abeyance to mischievous and degrading purposes."

planatory of the objects and advantages of the undertaking.

In London very little is known of the movements of parties likely to exhibit: apathy, or fear of informing others, has prevented parties sending an intimation of the space they will probably require. It is very important that definite information on this head should reach the central committee as speedily as possible. It would be useful if the various trades would each arrange to meet and talk the matter over; but feelings of jealousy would, perhaps, make this difficult. It is important that each branch of industry should be well represented in the Exhibition, and means must be devised to secure this. Inventions and improvements connected with the construction, fitting up, and decoration of buildings, should occupy no inconsiderable area in the proposed Exhibition, and should form a most instructive and interesting portion of it. We shall be glad to assist in insuring this, by any means that may seem to promise success.

Some time ago we advocated the creation of an "order of merit," and the suggestion was warmly taken up by several of our contemporaries. This would seem the moment of all others for such an institution, in connection with the forthcoming exhibition, and we again throw out the suggestion, and very respectfully recommend it for the consideration of his Royal Highness Prince Albert.

ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSES FOR THE PREVENTION OF FIRES.

It is matter of surprise, notwithstanding the serious losses sustained every year by fire, that there has been so little attention paid to devising some means by which such, in a great measure, might be prevented. True, on sundry occasions, when the loss has been great and the fire of alarming extent, we hear the murmurings, as it were, of a forthcoming effort; but these die prematurely away, and, save here and there some faint indications of interest taken in the matter, the determination to do something is strangled in its very birth, and in a short time all is quiet again. As we, who now dwell in what we are pleased to term an enlightened age, look back with astonishment at the rude structural arrangements of our forefathers, and perceive clearly the cause of such calamitous devastations as befell them,—so in like manner, we take it, will our descendants look back on our present plans, and see the cause of so many serious losses by fire.

We are certainly entitled to express some degree of astonishment that so little has been done in this matter. With one or two solitary exceptions, very few systematic plans have been promulgated. A brief inquiry into the philosophy of cause and effect would, we opine, do much to clear the subject of its difficulty. We could then perceive that where we persist in carrying out plans in spite of all prudential reasons and in defiance of all natural laws, we have no right to expect immunity from danger, or to dread the punishment when we have broken the law. In many of our domestic and other structures, we see arrangements that are positively conducive of danger,—placed there, as it were, to favour the chance of fire, to assist, to help it in its progress, if, perchance, it should break out. To point out these defective arrangements, how to remedy them, and to give suggestions of a practical nature, useful in constructing fire-proof, or partly fire-proof buildings in a simple and inexpensive manner, is the object of our present article.

In the consideration of the subject, we shall treat, first, of private dwellings, fireplaces, flues, &c.; secondly, public buildings, modes of heating; and, thirdly, commercial houses and manufactories.

If, in all cases of fire in private dwelling-houses, rigid examinations were entered into, with a view to ascertain the causes, we are of opinion that nine out of ten would be found